

US Postal Service city letter carriers face cuts under next contract

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Do you work at USPS? Tell us what about the NALC contract talks, the cuts to rural carriers' wages, or "Delivering for America" by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

For nearly three months, city letter carriers of the United States Postal Service (USPS) have been working without a new contract. The last deal ended on May 20, and a statutory 60-day mediation period ended on July 19, but the National Association of Letter Carriers union (NALC) has continued to meet with USPS for nearly a month without either party declaring an impasse.

The latter action would trigger binding arbitration, termed "Interest Arbitration," as the final step in the process, resulting in the imposition of a new contract on terms almost certainly favorable to USPS. Given that this would deprive workers of the right to vote on their own contract, that would effectively impose an agreement in a similar manner to the contract enforced last year on US railroaders. On the other hand, if no impasse is declared, negotiations can continue for a tentative contract leading to a vote by the workers.

But regardless of how the process proceeds, left in the hands of the NALC and USPS, the only possible outcome will be an attack on workers' living standards. The experience of the rural letter carriers, under the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), is instructive. Under the new method for calculating their wages, the Rural Routes Evaluation and Compensation System or RRECS, rural letter carriers have seen their pay slashed by as much as \$20,000 a year, with fewer days off.

The massive wage cuts were not the product of a "glitch" in the new system. It was implemented as part of the massive restructuring plan authored by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a Trump appointee

retained by Biden, which is being devised in collaboration with the postal union bureaucrats.

Called "Delivering for America," it is designed to reconstruct the US Postal Service as a spoke-and-wheel, Amazon-like package delivery company. It is widely seen as a potential first step in privatizing the post office.

In order to accomplish this, massive cost-cutting is necessary. DeJoy has said as many as 50,000 jobs will be lost and 100,000 carrier routes changed and adjusted in three years.

City carriers face similar changes as the rural carriers, implemented in the name of "efficiency." This includes a new method of route evaluation, involving invasive surveillance technology, to speed up and discipline letter carriers. Called Technology Integrated Alternative Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process (TIAREAP), it was adopted in two Memorandums of Understanding with NALC on May 10, 2022, for the duration of 2022 and 2023. This was implemented prior to the new contract.

The scanner and GPS technology that is central to TIAREAP tracks every movement of city carriers during the workday. It is called DSR, standing for Digital Street Review. DSR tracks every second of a carrier's activity and subjects them to disciplinary charges for "stationary events." Stationary events are defined as any time when productivity is interrupted. Therefore, stationary events would include stopping for 45 seconds to hydrate with a cool drink of water on a hot day, bathroom stops and stopping to exchange greetings with a patron on the route.

This was likely the disciplinary system used against Eugene Gates, Jr. a 36-year city carrier in Dallas, Texas who died of heat stroke in June. In the months before his death, Gates, who previously had a spotless record,

received his first disciplinary charge of his career. The new monitoring system claimed he committed at least 1 hour and 15 minutes of “stationary events” that interrupted productivity.

Gates died completing his route in the sweltering heat on June 20, less than a month following the disciplinary action. The NALC union representative never offered a single genuine defense to these charges against Gates.

Sorting and Delivering Centers (S&DCs) are also being set up as part of a spoke-and-wheel delivery network modeled on the Amazon package delivery system. Letter carriers are being forced to leave Post Offices they have worked at all of their working lives and migrate to a centralized facility wherever USPS chooses, usually at a great distance.

The S&DC will be a much larger, centralized facility, potentially consolidating dozens of Post Offices with hundreds of routes. The routes will be re-evaluated and changed according to TIAREAP. The end result is that carriers’ unpaid commutes will be longer, their working days will be longer and more carriers will not finish their routes before dark.

In an interview with KBTX about the future S&DC in the town of Bryan, Texas, retired carrier Jamie Partridge of Community and Postal Workers United said that “letter carriers are already working into the night and dark, retiring early, hiring on and then quitting,” and the S&DC plan will “just accelerate that process.”

The first district that was reorganized around a S&DC Center was in Athens, Georgia last year. According to the *Oconee Enterprise*, “One carrier noted that she was not able to start her 77-mile route until 11:10 a.m., leaving only five hours of daylight to deliver to 386 mailboxes during the busiest time of year.”

Despite the fact that no new contract agreement yet officially exists, the National Association of Letter Carriers monthly *Postal Record* magazine for August has come out pre-emptively defending it. The cover story claims: “There Will Be No Post Office Closures or Employee Layoffs as Part of Our S&DC Roll Outs.”

In reality, over a year ago Postmaster DeJoy, speaking at the American Enterprise Institute, said that 19,000 Post Offices would be reduced to 12,000 or 13,000 by consolidating them into S&DCs. He went on to state, “To get break even, I think we need to get 50,000 people out of the organization.”

Postal Record promotes the new plan in The glossy cover story and an inside five-page spread. The title is “Delivering for America: Letter Carriers’ involvement with USPS’s 10 year plan.” It tells city carriers how they will be forced to move away from their Post Offices to the mandated S&DC location under contract Article 12 of the existing contract. It presents DeJoy and the USPS’s “Delivering for America” as the unchallengeable, undoubted restructuring plan that will govern the future of USPS and all city carriers.

In reality, workers can fight back, but only by taking their fight out of the control of the NALC bureaucracy. This means forming a new alternative structure that workers control, a USPS Rank-and-File Committee, to fight against Post Office closures, job losses and massive wage cuts.



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